

# Psychological Trauma Reflected in B.Rangarao's Dalit Short Story *Death of a Rich Man*

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## Abstract

*In the growing expansion of marginalized literature, B.Rangarao's short story collection "Desperate Men and Women: Ten Dalit Short Stories from India" has been greatly applauded by the readers as it brilliantly exposed the trauma of both men and women of Dalit community in autocratic conditions in India. In Dalit writing Rangarao's contribution gave fresh look especially to the short story genre as it is based on the revolutionary ideas of Shahu Phule and Dr Ambedkar. As a writer he follows the literary path of Baburao Bagul, Anna Bhau Sathe, Waman Howal and Shankarrao Kharat and enriched the tradition of Dalit writing. The present short story entitled as "Death of a Rich Man" shows the discriminatory system based on age old orthodox traditions and customs that subordinates and even humiliates both men and women of Dalit community in the village setup. In addition to that it focuses on multiple issues related to the Dalit's survival like poverty, untouchability, struggle for survival, and gender disparity. The present research paper humbly concentrates on the character of Sattya who represents the Mahar community whose life has been preoccupied with adverse conditions at personal as well as socio-cultural level, which is why he suffers from psychological trauma in the story. The character of Sattya has been studied under the light of psychological trauma theory and holds castiest society responsible for it.*

**Keywords:** Marginalized, trauma, Dalit writing, discriminatory system, psychological

## INTRODUCTION

### HISTORIOGRAPHY OF DALIT WRITING

Dalit literature is divided into four major parts; poetry, short story, novels and autobiographies. The role of Shahu Phule and Ambedkar was undeniable in shaping Dalit literature in India. Dalit literature also popularly known as the origin of literature of protest in India was first seen in the struggles of Dr.B.R. Ambedkar, he publicly criticized the Manusmriti for supporting untouchability and caste prejudice at a convention in late 1927. Dr. Ambedkar persisted in vehemently denouncing the caste system in India. Dalit movement was first started in Maharashtra in 1972 and then later spread to

different parts of India. Dalit writers developed their literary career under the philosophical path of Dr.B.R. Ambedkar who toiled his life entire life in the subversion of caste system. He was of the opinion that caste system was one of the obstacles of social harmony that has paralyzed the concept of unity. Baburao Bagul's "When I Concealed My Caste" marked the beginning of Dalit protest movement; alongside him some more prominent writers of Dalit literature were Anna Bhau Sathe with his short story works in Dalit literature, Dr B.R. Ambedkar and his book "Annihilation of Caste (1936)". [1]

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Received Date: October 28, 2023

Accepted Date: November 23, 2023

Published Date: November 27, 2023

**Citation:** S.N. Parkale, Vishnu Rajput. Psychological Trauma Reflected in B.Rangarao's Dalit Short Story *Death of a Rich Man*. Emerging Trends in Languages. 2024; 1(1): 1–7p.

As Dalit protest movement gained attraction and momentum more writers emerged with their autobiographies and books, some accurate and popular examples can be Laxman Mane's "Upara" which is his autobiography that he published in the year 1980. It was well received by the readers because it is a path breaking work in Marathi literature which has contents like lively depiction of the life of downtrodden community, authenticity of experience and a strong social plea for justice. Baby Tai Kamble, also known as Baby Kamble was an important Mahar icon, her autobiographical novel "Prison We Broke" discusses the status of Dalit women in Indian society who faces the double marginalization of being a Dalit and a women. Aside from issues like sexual exploitation and rejection of rights of women, financial deprivation and poverty were important notable themes present in her autobiography. Her iconic contribution played a major role in enriching the Dalit literature in India. Another major author who had a great role in the contribution of Dalit literature is Namdeo Dhasal, he wrote columns and poems in Marathi newspapers and influenced the common people to rise against unjust and wrong treatment in the society by the upper caste people, his first and arguably one of the best poetry collection was "Golpitha (1972)" The poetry in this anthology draws on the locale of Golpitha, a district in Mumbai that is sometimes perceived as the hub of prostitution, gangster wars, and a place where everything criminal, nefarious, exploitative and inhuman finds a place, apart from his contributions to the literary world he was also the founder of Dalit Panther Organization. Dalit literature has been developing at a steady pace since the start of Dalit protest and Black Panther movement. In recent years, there has been a rise in the number of strong and influential Dalit authors who are changing the literary landscape with their distinctive viewpoints and narratives. P. Sivakami, who is regarded as one of the most well-known Dalit authors currently, is one such author. It's widely acknowledged that her work "The Grip of Change" is a literary masterpiece written by Dalits. With three collections that have been published, Vijila Chirrapad, a fellow Dalit woman author who lives in Kerala, has made a substantial addition to the genre. Her essays frequently examine the difficulties and problems encountered by women.

## REVIEW OF LITERATURE

### B.RANGARAO'S LITERARY CONTRIBUTION

B.Rangrao is one of the most prolific writers of Dalit writing in India who has made a major impact on Dalit literature with his short story collection "Desperate Men and Women: Ten Dalit Short Stories from India" which has settings and characters from all over India. He was greatly influenced by Ambedkar's philosophy. B.Rangrao as a writer had a profound experience of de-alienating the life experiences of Dalit men and women in India. He had strongly criticized the existence of untouchability in the society that prevents dalits from basic human rights. The present short story collection is a significant contribution to Dalit short stories that gave name and fame to B.Rangrao and landed him into the category of great writers like Baburao Bagul and Shankarrao Kharat. The early writers focused on the philosophy of Shahu Phule and Ambedkar. B.Rangrao strongly imitated early Dalit writers in case of his literary career. B.Rangrao is a former professor of English at Mumbai University. Among his accomplishments are anthologies of English-language poetry, as well as critical works on English poetry, current American literature, and modern Indian English novels. Additionally, he edited a Marathi book on Dalit poetry for Sahitya Akademi. He has also edited many magazines and journals. The present short story collection "Desperate Men and Women: Ten Dalit Short Stories from India" (2013) skillfully shows the evils of caste system and its impact on the socio-economic and psychological conditions on the characters present in the story. In his works the desperate men and women try to raise their voices against the evil effects of caste system as attached to the title "Desperate Men and Women: Ten Dalit Short Stories from India" implying that the Dalit protagonist in the stories are suffering a mountain of problems due to the societal and traditional norms which include themes like sexual exploitation of women, untouchability, caste discrimination, poverty, starvation and protest [2]. B.Rangrao's short stories display intense truth and realism about the sufferings of Dalits, one story in particular stands out to show the sufferings of Dalit women and that is Death of Rich Man.

## PSYCHOLOGICAL TRAUMA THEORY

Extremely stressful situations that destroy your sense of security and leave you feeling powerless in a hazardous environment can cause emotional and psychological trauma. You may have persistent anxiety, distressing memories, and other negative emotions as a result of psychological trauma, in B.Rangarao's short stories these type of trauma and problems in the life of Dalit characters are becoming more and more common, one excellent and accurate example we can analyse is the character of Satyawant Treymbak Meshram (Sattya) in the short story of "The Death of a Rich Man". Before jumping into the life of Sattya we need to first understand the Psychological Trauma theory in Detail. These days, it seems that trauma, danger, crisis, and terror are more common. A person can observe death, devastation, and chaos from the comfort of their own room's television. They take a toll on and individual's well-being. Prolonged exposure to violence or trauma has severe effects on the well-being of an individual, According to Gilliland and James (1993).

A crisis occurs when an event or situation is perceived as being intolerably stressful and outpacing a person's resources and coping mechanisms. Although the incident or scenario may take many different forms, it is the emotional response to the event or situation that sets off the crisis. This crisis might be too much for the person to handle, which might lead them to react pathologically. Suicidal and violent thoughts may come to mind when someone is in a crisis. Crisis situations themselves have the power to seriously harm a person's cognitive, affective, and behavioral states. A person is rendered helpless and impotent by trauma because of the suffocating force of the event.

In B. Rangarao's short story the same can be concluded because the psychological effects and conditions of the characters are skilfully displayed so the readers could understand it better. Sattya's psychological trauma reflected in the story, for that the rigid caste system is responsible. Due to the presence of it the Dalits have been denied the access to the normal social life. In India caste system has been said to damage the Indian unity and integrity. This short story appeals to Indian readers and expects them to change their mindset against the caste system and bring change to Indian unity. The character of Sattya is an imaginary creation of B.Rangarao yet it speaks out the naked reality of Dalit boys in a village setup better than a real person could. "Death of a Rich Man" exposes multiple factors related to Dalits' lives [3,4]. At the start of the story a scene is set in the classroom of a school where the teacher is calling out Sattya's name for attendance and when a student remarks that he is absent again the teacher is annoyed and said how will he pass the next examination as seen in the line "Teacher got annoyed. 'How will he pass the examination and go to the next class', he said to himself. 'Why don't his parents take proper care of the boy and send him to school?' With this information the readers assume that Sattya is not study centered and has no passion towards studying and the parents of Sattya are termed as irresponsible by the teacher for not taking proper care of Sattya and allowing him to loiter around but remember this is the perspective of a qualified and educated teacher that is well off in terms of money but in the case of Sattya's family this isn't the case, his parents are both trying their best to earn money somehow since his mother takes up minor household jobs but the payment is never enough to take care of the family expenses and as far as Sattya's father is concerned, he is a band member but that job is a seasonal work based job and therefore his father is unemployed half the time so the parents of Sattya are more worried about real problems in their opinion like money and food rather than education. The scene right after this tells us that Sattya is busy enjoying the cool river water with his buddies and diving from a cliff into it. "He was not alone, several boys from the locality who were his constant companions were engaged in the act". This line tells us that the group of Dalit boys together had no sense or passion for studying and also the reason for the backwardness of the Dalit caste could be the uninteresting attitude of Dalit children towards studying in village setups. Sattya was seven years old and was recently enrolled in school, "He could never understand why three into four becomes twelve and was eventually punished by the teacher." This could be the reason that Sattya skipped school aside from the family monetary problems. Sattya's father had to look after two more children other than Sattya and his Band Party job to play music at weddings was unreliable since there were no marriages half the time, by this we know the difficulties in the life of Dalit family who had no sure way to earn money and were barely getting by. The river that flowed near village was a true gift from Mother Nature to the people of the

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village and in the short story this particular line explains this very well "It washed the newborn of its blood-smear skin, it offered enormous scope to young men and women for their youthful activities [5]. It also generously adopted within itself the old folks who wished to breathe their last breath watching the river flow". The river bank was also used as a graveyard and a place for the cremation of the dead, it was used separately by two communities. The lower caste buries the dead body while the upper caste cremated them. The boys would go to the cemetery following the conclusion of the burial rites because they would discover some coins strewn about the grave and at the location where the deceased were cremated. Therefore it is said in the story "The death of a rich man would earn them some money as the affluent show their generosity more in death than in life" this line is no doubt one of the most important and deep lines to exist in the story of B.Rangrao because the amount of meaning that is portrayed with this line is incomprehensible by a normal mindset, this line tells us the reality of the rich in India and how the poor are actually despised by them during their lives but once they are dead it serves as an earning opportunity for the poor because if the rich couldn't help them when they were alive they are at least helping the poor after their death by serving as a means of income. Therefore it is clearly depicted in the story up till now that the rich are mean and do not lend a helping hand to the poor under any circumstances but it is quite the irony that they are being useful to the low income class after death. In this story the rich man was Seth Jhabarmal who was well over eighty years of age but it was inevitable for him to fall ill, that he did and that news spread like wildfire. Seth Jhabarmal was a rich marwadi whose forefathers migrated from Rajasthan and when they migrated "they had nothing but a dhoti and a lota" meaning they had nothing when they had arrived but since marwadis are known for their business tactics and skillful trading he soon built an empire and became wealthy with the business knowledge that he possesses but still how he managed to amass such wealth disproportionately is a mystery to all [6].

Seth Jhabarmal was bedridden for almost six months and several doctors were called and Ayurvedic medicine was also applied but there was no improvement in his health, soon he was placed in a charpai which was a sure sign of inevitable approach of death. Although he was a nice man, liberal towards young women in particular he passed away the next day. His death saddened the vicinity. This was a sign of death sadness and grief for the people of the village, on the contrary for Sattya and his companions it was a sign to earn money and prove their worth to their parents. This piece of information enlightens us with the reality of life for Dalit people in the setting of village and rural areas in India where there are no sources of income. They congregated close to Seth Jhabarmal's large homes. It was a tall, expansive building, making it challenging to find the front door. By the crowd gathered there, Sattya and his friends could make it out. As they made their way through the crowd, they learned that after all of the family members had gathered and said their final farewells, the body of Seth would be carried to the cemetery for cremation. The granddaughter of the Seth, who married last year, is expected to arrive anytime now. The Seth was really fond of this girl, hence his body cannot be removed until she has his final viewing. A young lady emerged from it. A male and two senior women followed her. The boys exhaled a sigh of relief from a distance. They weren't certain, though, if she was the same granddaughter of the Seth who had been married the previous year and whose bride they had observed so attentively. They also questioned whether she was the same woman whose presence had been highly anticipated [7].

The boys' focus was suddenly diverted by a disturbance. It was mostly women's wailing voice. They all cast intense gazes forward. A man emerged, carrying an earthen bowl with ambers that gave off smoke. Four men carrying the ladder followed him. The deceased body of Seth Jhabarmal was transported to the cemetery for cremation. The boys assumed positions such as Jackals are out and about. "This was an occasion to earn a few coins and prove their worth to their parents who considered them as worthless. They would not let it go." These lines are important in terms of understanding how the minds of Dalit children and parents work, in the lines it is stated that it was an occasion to earn a few coins and prove their worth to their parents meaning the parents thought that their children were worthless which severely affects the upbringing of a child, when a child is told repeatedly that he is

worthless and has no real contribution to the family the child develops a sense of inferiority and is obligated to do something about proving their worth to their families not caring about the way and method that goal is achieved. The line “they would not let it go” depicts the determination and strong mindset of the children to do something about their worthlessness to their parents. In psychology the development of a child is a very sensitive phase in their life since the brains cognitive functions and goals are set at that age remain very rigid and strong until that child is a grown adult. A process known as crystallization that starts to happen in humans around the age of 40 means that when a person is getting old their brains cannot process new knowledge and it is extremely difficult for them to alter their thoughts, for example if you have closely observed your parents then you might have noticed them having trouble to cope with new technology ideas and information [8,9]. This process starts at an early age where the brain starts to store information about various subjects, topics and social sense as the child grows up these values and topics become more and more rigid for example the son of a bigot will become a bigot too if he listens to his father views and ideals since an early age. Therefore here begins Sattya’s psychologically traumatic journey. Sattya is only seven years old when ideas like “he is worthless” are imposed on him by the society and his parents this affects his thinking and cognitive behavior in a damaging way that should not occur for child as young as Sattya. This is not only the fault of the caste system that imposed difficulties on the parents to make them think in such a survival centered way but also the fault of the parents for displaying such arrogance for the feelings for their children. Remarks like that have negative impacts on Sattya’s confidence and develops an inferiority complex. If a child like Sattya has to face such difficulties in an early age it develops the problem of low confidence of cognitive abilities. Just by a single line B.Rangrao has shown the negative psychological impacts on Sattya in his rural Dalit life [10].

Moving on in the story it is customary for the Hindu’s to hurl one rupee coins, sometimes of a greater value, over the head of dead bodies while they are being carried to the graveyard. The boys split up into two groups and chose a side—right or left, this shows that even at such a young age the boys developed a level of street smart and have the strategical mindset to form groups to cover both side of the procession and have maximum efficiency to collect coins. Ram nam Satya Hai resounded sonorously through the air. It went on for a while. Coins were thrown across the corpse in a flurry. The guys' unwavering eyes caught sight of them. They scrambled for the coins in an attempt to capture them in the air since they lacked the patience to wait until they fell to the ground this shows that how badly they wanted the coins and it’s not as if they wanted the money to spend it on themselves or waste it, they wanted the money to give it to their families and prove their worth to them [11,12]. The men attempted to shoo them away since their presence in the parade irritated them identical to the fact that upper caste men are irritated by the mere existence of Dalit people. The men understood that although these youngsters from the lower castes are harmless, yet they are a constant annoyance for them. The money that was thrown over the corpse was intended for the underprivileged people who would pray for the deceased and bless his soul but in this case the boys had no intention of praying for the deceased but only harbored competitive mindset to satisfy their parents [Cause of the psychological trauma imposed on them by their parents]. Thus, the irritation they experienced would gave way to tolerance [13]. Then they would repeatedly chant, "Ram nam Satya Hai." The youngsters again jumped at them like ravenous leopards as coins were thrown across the corpse. The procession was heading towards the cemetery, which was now in view. The river ran peacefully despite the normal flurry of activity on its banks. A large majority of the boys had their catches. Sattya lacked any even though he seemed to be the most determined out of all the boys. "How shall I show face to my father? He thought to himself the exponential set of mindset that Sattya has accomplished through having his brain mentally and psychologically battered by his parents is amazing to see here, in the face of such difficulties, being trampled upon, not being able to catch any coins not being able to prove his worth and being so physically tired all Sattya could think right now was how could he show his face to his father, this further explains the psychological trauma that Sattya has gone through because this could only mean one thing and that is Sattya is so rock bound is proving to his father that he is not worthless this is the cause and effect of psychological trauma theory that has been affecting Sattya’s growth and mindset,

according to psychologists and many renowned child psychology and cognitive behavioral experts a child should not only do things to please his parents and not go as far as Sattya did to please his parents, it creates an extrinsically motivated child which is not a positive aspect since he will grow up to be motivated by things like money and praises from others and other materialistic things. "If I fail and return home empty-handed, my father will undoubtedly beat me." At this point in the story it is just sad to witness a psychological child disaster such as Sattya because even after trying so hard jumping and pouncing on mere coins just to please his father he thinks that his efforts will not be appreciated in the least [14,15]. When Sattya says that if he fails and returns home empty handed his father will beat him, it also means that due to psychological trauma Sattya's mind has been forced to grow up to be more mature than his age because a child will never even think of going home empty handed or even that concept in general but here on the contrary Sattya is scared of the physical battering and also scared of being the failure that his parents thinks him to be. When he considered being beat, he shivered. "But do not despair", he said to himself still not giving up in the least even though so much has happened and so many defeats have been suffered by him through the hands of society and allies, "Coins are still being thrown." I'll make one more attempt, my final and best" Still in the face of despair Sattya stood tall more than ever and decided to make one final effort his best one to get those coins and in a symbolic way Sattya wanted to catch his respect and freedom that was being hurled by the upper caste at any cost. The sound of the coins jolted him back into reality. When he saw the coins being thrown into the air, he sprang in their direction like the young Hanuman doing so to the rising sun. Unfortunately he missed them and collapsed to the ground like a large pumpkin squashing his face and body on the ground. This temporarily disrupted the parade. The men called the youngster names, assaulted him, and uttered curses because all the men could see was a lower caste boy who was greedy for the coins but alas nobody could comprehend Sattya's mental and psychological battles [16]. However, they quickly took up their positions again and advanced to crush the boy's lifeless body and limbs, Sattya's body is now called lifeless because he has suffered complete and utter defeat and there was no more reason for him to move, given his last attempt, emptied of his last bits of motivations Sattya was defeated, defeated by life? Defeated by upper caste? Defeated by the trauma imposed on him? Defeated by monetary power? Perhaps all these things are the answer to Sattya's sufferings. While Sattya's lifeless body lay neglected in the roadway, Seth Jhabarmal's funeral procession arrived at the cemetery. Once more, the chorus of Ram nam Satya hai... Ram nam Satya hai... could be heard. Once again reality wins and hopes and dreams lost Sattya couldn't prove his worth at any cost.

## CONCLUSION

B.Rangarao "Death of a Rich Man" shows the psychological trauma experienced by the local boys of Mahar community. Here, Rangarao holds village age old orthodox traditions and casteism responsible for the deplorable conditions of Dalit boys. Even that too constantly torments and humiliates Dalit boys in village set up. This short story keenly portrays the perturbing lives of Dalit boys who are in search for money as they want to prove themselves as worth members of their family. This short story shows the different the life patterns of Dalit boys who have been preoccupied with poverty and untouchability. The reality of life is bitter, sometimes things and expectations not always go as planned, in Sattya's case the amount of psychological trauma he suffered from resulted in his actions of collecting coins and avenging his title of a useful son to his father but he could not get it done and lies defeated in the post-procession road as if a soldier who fought a great battle of courage but still was defeated in the battle. In Sattya's case the same can be assumed, the only difference that Sattya had was his battle was psychological and mental in nature. It is not easy for a seven year old child to go through such immense and intense trauma which makes him think like an adult. The conditions that Sattya was likely suffering from was being nagged on, inferiority complex, extrinsic motivation and various things. All this was caused by society, caste and class, his parents and the social class system.

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